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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIPEI MAYOR MA YING-JEOU

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major dailies all gave significant reporting and editorial coverage November 16 to Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, who apologized Wednesday for his office's administrative defects in handling the special mayoral allowance. Most papers front-paged Ma's apology and devoted several of their inside pages to more detailed reports on the flaws in Ma's office's reimbursement procedures, the reactions of the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps to the development of this event, and the impact of this event on Ma, his political future, and on the upcoming Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral elections. The pro-unification "United Daily News" also front-paged the results of its latest survey, which showed that 58 percent of those polled said they believe in Ma's integrity, and 65 percent said they do not think Ma needs to resign. An "Apple Daily" poll also showed that 63.47 percent of respondents believe that Ma need not resign, since he had no prior knowledge of the administrative flaws in his office.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, editorials in both the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest-circulation daily, and the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" both called on prosecutors to use the same criteria to examine President Chen Shui-bian and Ma. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" also decried the double standard applied to Chen versus to Ma. An editorial in the pro-status quo "China Times" urged Ma to see President Chen's case as a mirror and deal with the affair proactively. A "United Daily News" editorial lamented the rough state of Taiwan's democratic development and said justice should be upheld in this severe constitutional crisis. End summary.

A) "Prosecutors Should Use the Same Criterion to Examine Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (11/16):

"... The public will focus its attention on the follow-on political impact triggered by Ma's case. Whether or not the prosecutors will use the same criterion to investigate this and other similar cases will be a test for the credibility of Taiwan's judiciary, and it will be closely monitored by the Taiwan people. ... Since Ma is deeply mired in the scandals, it is foreseeable that the statements made by the pan-Blue camp over the past few months to abuse and insult President Chen Shui-bian will come back to haunt them. Even though these may be the undesirable consequences of an eye for an eye in Taiwan's political circle, we still believe that on top of this political phenomenon, the Taiwan people should pay more attention to the topic of how to fulfill 'transitional justice.' ..."

B) "Same Criterion for Bian and Ma"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000]

editorialized (11/16):

"... Both Chen Shui-bian's case and Ma Ying-jeou's case must be examined using the same criteria. This is the highest principle of law. The public should also use the same criteria to judge these two cases, because this is a moral principle. ..."

C) "Different Rules for Different Folks"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (11/16):

"... The double standard is brazen. Ma called Chen's behavior 'corruption' and demanded the president step down. When caught doing the same thing, he dismisses the case as administrative negligence. ... The truth of the matter is that both the mayoral expense fund and the 'state affairs fund' are indicative of an era when public money was used with impunity. The rules governing these funds are out of date in today's democratic environment. But until the legal structures are fixed, let's hold Ma up to his own standards of morality: Mayor Ma, you were caught with your hand in the cookie jar. Maybe you should consider stepping down."

D) "Ma Ying-jeou Should See Chen Shui-bian as a Mirror"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (11/16):

"... As it stands now, for Ma Ying-jeou, he had better use Chen Shui-bian as a mirror, and the best crisis management for him is to confront the issue; do not dodge, do not tell lies to cover up negligence and, moreover, do not try to think about loss and gains for [the presidential elections in] 2008. At this moment, it is up to the prosecutors' investigation to determine the crime and punishment [for Ma] on the legal aspect, but on the political aspect, it hinges on public opinion and trends to determine [Ma's]

crime and punishment. Ma's only choice is that his words and deeds must be worthy of his conscience, and this is something that Taiwan's political circle is short of."

E) "What If Ma Ying-jeou and Chen Shui-bian Both Will Face 'Initial Trial'"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (11/16):

"... We want to emphasize again: Maintaining justice will be upheld as the highest principle in this constitutional crisis. Taiwan people should use this criterion to examine other political figures' reactions to Bian's case and to Ma's case. Chen's case is one thing, while Ma's case is another; each has its own separate political responsibility. One must not use Ma's case to invalidate Chen's; neither should one use Chen's case to cover up Ma's. ..."

YOUNG